78-6

78-6

Foreign Fisheries Leaflet No. 78-6

Fisheries of The Gambia, 1977

Office of International Fisheries
Washington, D.C.
May 1978

JUL 5 1978

William B. Folsom

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Serivce

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/foreign-fisheries-leaflet_1977_78-6

FISHERIES OF THE GAMBIA, 1977

William B. Folsom
Regional Fisheries Attache
U.S. Consulate General, Casablanca, Morocco

CONTENTS

I. Introduction..... 1

II. Fishery resources..... 1
A. Marine..... 1
B. Freshwater..... 1

III. Fisheries catch..... 1

IV. Artisanal fisheries..... 1
A. Marine..... 1
B. Freshwater..... 3

V. Commercial fisheries..... 3
A. Gambia Industrial Fishing Co..... 3
B. Seagull Coldstores (Gambia), Ltd. 4
C. Fish Marketing Cooperative..... 5

VI. Fisheries administration..... 5

VII. Foreign fisheries assistance..... 5
A. UNDP (United National Development Fund)..... 5
B. EEC (European Economic Community).. 5
C. Denmark..... 6

VIII. Fisheries trade..... 6
A. Export..... 6
B. Imports..... 6

IX. Sales opportunities for U.S. firms..... 6

X. Acknowledgments..... 6

ABSTRACT

The Gambia's fishermen caught 10,795 metric tons(t) of fish in 1974, slightly less than the estimated maximum sustainable yield(MSY) of 12,000 t. On January 1, 1978, the Government of The Gambia officially took over the shares of the ex-Japanese shrimp exporting firm and bought a 49-percent interest in a Ghanaian firm, thus putting the government firmly into fisheries. In February 1978, Fisheries Director, Olu Taylor Thomas, left his position for a job in private industry. The industry remains small, but quite successful. Exports of fish continue, and sufficient fish are available locally.

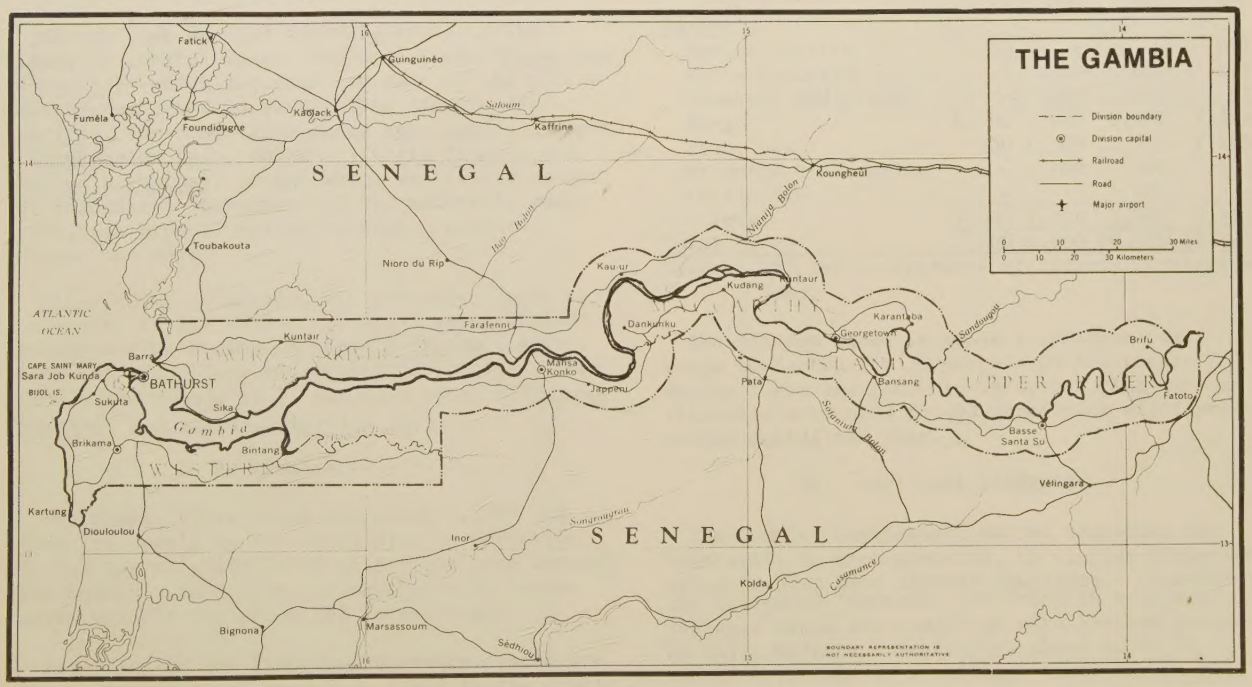
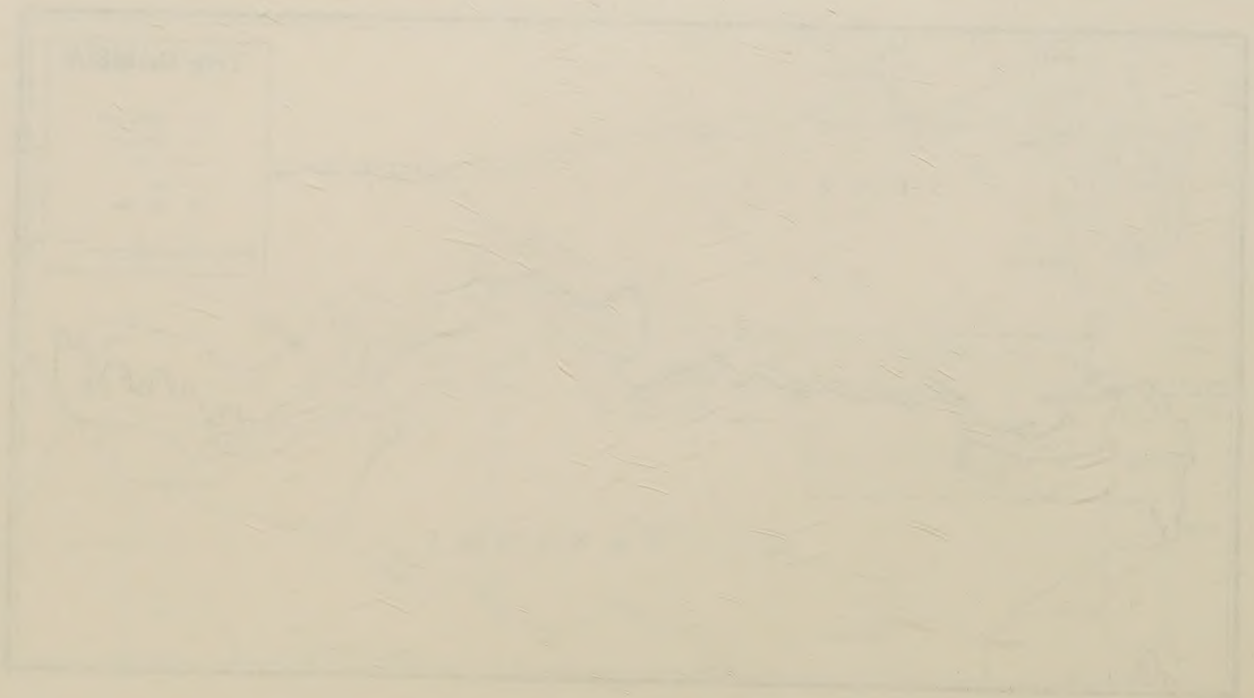


Figure 1.--Map of The Gambia.



I. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of The Gambia is a West African nation located on the Atlantic Ocean and surrounded on three sides by Senegal. The Gambia is about 70 kilometers(km) wide at its widest point--the coastline--and about 20 km wide at its narrowest point. The nation stretches inland for about 480 km along the winding banks of the Gambia River (fig. 1). The Gambia is slightly smaller than the State of Connecticut, with a total land area of about 10,360 km^2.

The nation's population is about 370,000, of which about 30,000 people live in Banjul, the capital city. The Gambia gained independence from Great Britain on February 18, 1965.

II. FISHERY RESOURCES

A. Marine

In 1973, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources of The Gambia and the Ministry of Fisheries of the USSR signed a fisheries research agreement. The results of the first USSR survey by the RV Viandra showed that The Gambia has a standing stock of 95 demersal and other fish species, of which 4,000 metric tons (t) could be caught each year within the 3,855-km^2 continental shelf. In addition, because of the constant migration of fish through Gambian waters, an extra 4,000 to 8,000 t could be safely caught--for a minimum catch of 8,000 t to a maximum catch of 12,000 t per year; during 1973 to 1974, Gambian fishermen averaged 10,000 t of fish.

Marine fish species commonly found in The Gambia's coastal waters include: Bonga (Ethmalosa dorsalis)--which accounts for most of the marine catch--round-bodied sardinellas (Sardinella aurita), barracuda (Sphyraena sphyraena), grouper (Epinephelus sp.), mullets (Trigla lineata and Mullus barbatus), tunas--which are mostly caught by Senegalese fishermen--jacks, mackerel, snappers, sea breams, marine catfish, croakers, drums, and rays.

Other forms of marine life commonly caught or harvested in The Gambia's coastal water include Atlantic pink shrimp (Penaeus duorarum), spiny lobsters (Panulirus and palinurus species), some cuttlefish (Sepia sp.), mangrove oysters (Ostrea edulis), and cockles (Cardium sp.).

B. Freshwater

The Gambia River flows for about 1,1000 km from its source in the Fouta Djallon Mountains in Guinea; only 480 km of this river pass through The Gambia. This river is navigable by ocean-going vessels for about 257 km upstream.

According to the Fisheries Division, there are 80 species of freshwater fish found in the Gambia River. Only nine freshwater species, however, are commercially important: four of these are freshwater catfish, and two are species of moonfish.

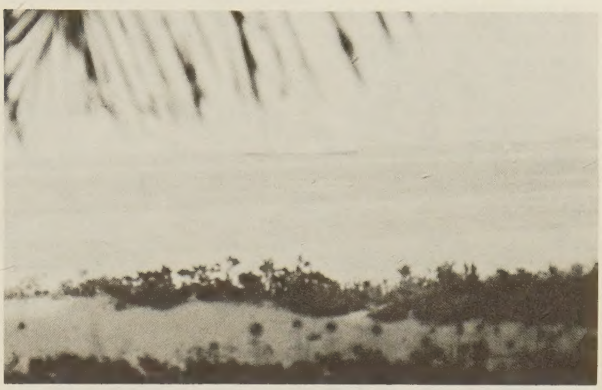


Figure 2.--An ocean-going freighter, seaward-bound, after unloading at Banjul; the other side of the Gambia River is visible in the photograph.

III. FISHERIES CATCH

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), The Gambia's fisheries catch was 10,795 t in 1974 as shown below (table 1):

Table 1.--The Gambia's fisheries catch, 1971-74 in metric tons

Species	1971	1972	1973	1974
Freshwater:				
Fish	800	800	800	800
Total	800	800	800	800
Marine				
Marine catfish	-	-	-	267
White groupers	-	-	600	696
Croakers and drums	-	100	100	83
Bonga	4,500	3,900	6,200	7,324
Fish, nes	500	1,100	2,200	1,442
Atlantic pink shrimp	-	100	300	183
Cuttlefish	-	-	200	-
Total	5,000	5,200	9,600	9,995
Total catch	5,800	6,000	10,400	10,795

Source: FAO. 1976. Yearbook of fishery statistics. Rome.

The figures shown in table 1 indicate that bonga accounted for 73 percent of the total marine fisheries catch in 1974, and that marine fisheries accounted for 93 percent of all fish caught during the year.

IV. ARTISANAL FISHERIES

The Gambia's artisanal, marine fisheries are identical, in most respects, to similar fisheries found in most West African countries. Generally, the artisanal fisheries are found in scattered villages along the coastline with limited access to major markets. Generally, about 10 to 20 canoes help make up a village. There are usually from two to five men per dugout canoe which means that a typical village has anywhere from

a low of 20 fishermen to a possible high of 100 fishermen; in most cases, the actual number of fishermen and vessels is between these two extremes.

The following sequence of photographs taken at the beach near the town of Gunjur--which is actually located 4 miles inland--gives the reader a fairly good impression of the typical fishing village.

Figure 3.--Fishermen unload freshly landed fish (including two marine catfish).

First, dugout canoes, which have been equipped with outboard motors in the past few years, return to the beach after a morning of fishing. The boat is wrestled ashore, and the catch unloaded. The women of the village immediately surround the catch and begin to bargain. The action is fast and furious as the women belittle the catches and as the fishermen defend their catches. In a short time, the beach becomes a market filled with small piles of fish, purchased by the different women.

The next step is drying the fish. The smaller-sized fish are split and degutted and then placed on wooden tables under the sun to dry. When fully dried, the fish are either placed into burlap bags for shipment to nearby markets, or the fish is further processed in nearby smoking huts.

Figure 4.--A deal has been made for some small sharks and rays and haggling over another group of fish has started.

Figure 5.--Fish drying in the sun; in the background, another canoe returns home.

Figure 6.--After smoking and/or sun drying, the fish is placed in burlap bags for shipment to nearby markets.

Figure 7.--Repairs are made to a fishing canoe.

The fishing village near Gunjur has been selected by the European Economic Community(EEC) as a site for their artisanal marine fisheries development program. This village, which has been assisted by the Gambian Government, already engages in a surprisingly large number of activities--including fishing, processing, selling and repairing ring vessels and outboard motors, etc. The village also serves as a model for the young and as a gathering place for social exchange--all surrounded by the active business of fishing.

Figure 8.--A fishing boat provides a bit of shade for children and a gathering point for women. The box in the foreground--which is normally used for holding lobsters at sea--was being used to hold two naughty children during the author's visit.

B. Freshwater

According to Gambian reports, there are about 760 canoes engaged in fishing along the 480 km of the Gambia River. Fishermen use traps, spears, hook and lines, baskets, cast nets, and set nets to catch their fish. Most of the catch is taken either to Bansang or Walikunda where it is sold. Much of the river fish catch is exported to Senegal.

V. COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

On January 1, 1978, the commercial fisheries sector was officially restructured. In essense, two major commercial fishery concerns were reorganized following the purchase of majority shares of stocks by the Government of The Gambia.

A. Gambia Industrial Fishing Company

The Gambia Industrial Fishing Company is a branch of the former Ghanaian joint venture firm called Seagull Fisheries, Limited. The Gambia Industrial Fishing Company now with Gambian Government participation will operate a fleet of fishing vessels that are owned by the Mankwadze Fishing Company of Tema, Ghana. These vessels will include the Konfo I, IV, VII, VIII, and XII--all steel purse seiners that were built in the Soviet Union and delivered to Ghana from 1963 to 1965. After the ouster of Soviet fishery technicans in 1966 from Ghana, these vessels remained, by and large, idle.

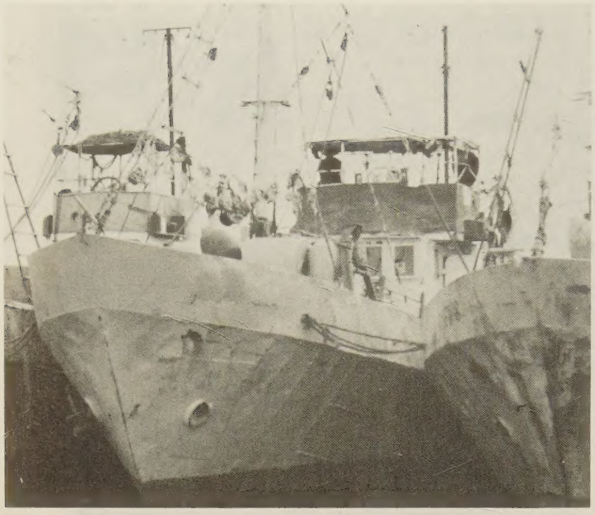


Figure 9.--The Ghanaian-Gambian joint venture fishing vessels Konfo I, V, and VIII in Banjul.

Seagull Fisheries Ltd. was initially established in 1968, but fishing did not begin until 1974 when the Monkoadze firm sent the sardine purse seiners, Pathfinder, Boreal, Austral, and Tropical, to Banjul. As of 1978, only the Pathfinder remains in Banjul with the company.

Figure 10.--The Gambia Industrial Fishing Company's sardine seiner, Pathfinder, unloads freshly caught sardines for freezing at the Seagull Coldstores (Gambia), Ltd. In the background, one can see a part of the main commercial port of Banjul.

The company also operates a small, wooden vessel, the Mbour (formerly the Livingston), which was also based (and built) in Ghana before it was sent to The Gambia.

Figure 11.--The wooden purse seiner, Mbour. In the background, the cold storage facilities of Seagull Coldstores (Gambia), Ltd. are visible.

B. Seagull Coldstores (Gambia), Ltd.

Seagull Coldstores is the second offshoot of the Ghanaian firm known as Seagull Fisheries, Limited, following the purchase of 49 percent of the shares of this firm by the Gambian Government. Under its new setup, the firm will operate only the freezing and cold storage facilities it owns in Banjul. The firm will also be allowed to export to Ghana.

Figure 12.--Seagull Coldstores (Gambia), Limited will freeze, store, and export frozen sardinellas and other fish caught by The Gambia Industrial Fishing Company's fleet of vessels.

Figure 13.--The firm will also process frozen fish unloaded from the Mankwadze, a 3,090-GRT factory stern trawler delivered by the USSR to Ghana in 1965; the vessel's captain was from the Soviet Union when this picture was taken (1978).

C. Fish Marketing Cooperative

The Fish Marketing Cooperative--or FMC as it is called in Banjul--used to be a Japanese joint venture firm that bought shrimp from artisanal river fishermen for export to Japan and the United States via Las Palmas, Canary Islands.

Under the new system, the Government of The Gambia owns 100 percent of the shares of the old firm, including two blast freezers and a plate freezer plus a cold storage room that can hold 700 t of fish. Other assets include a 20 t/day ice making machine.

Although the FMC has not yet begun to operate, it is thought that it will concentrate on exporting The Gambia's fish catch (as much as 80 percent of all fish passing through its doors will be exported) or selling fish locally. It is possible that the firm might, at some point in the future, establish up-country cold storage/sales facilities and will supply these centers with frozen fish. Again, these are only tentative plans.

The firm also hopes to revive the purchase of river shrimp from local fishermen for export to Las Palmas. It is also possible that the firm may work to develop a market for lobster (either whole or tails), but this remains a distant project.

In summary, January 1, 1978, marked a rather significant change in The Gambia's industrial fisheries with the government taking an active part in fisheries. Existing facilities will continue to function, but a new emphasis will be put on marketing--especially on exporting--fish.

Although no statistical data are available, commercial fisheries (the FMC not included) in The Gambia appear to be active, and fishing is good.

VI. FISHERIES ADMINISTRATION

The Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources is responsible for the development and administration of fisheries in The Gambia.

The Fisheries Division has been led by A. Olu Taylor-Thomas, one of the most dynamic fisheries administrator's in Africa. On February 8, 1978, however, Taylor-Thomas left government service to head up a newly established branch of an existing fishery firm.

The departure of Taylor-Thomas will leave a serious gap in the ranks of the division which includes three fishery officers, a technical officer, eight assistants, four fishery inspectors, and six mechanics.

The division maintains an office/laboratory at 6 Marina Foreshore in Banjul. The division operates a 42-ft trawler and two 30-ft canoes, each with an outboard motor. It also has two Landrovers.

One reason why The Gambia is a net exporter of fish--a very rare situation in Africa--is owing, in part, to Taylor-Thomas' willingness to go out to meet frequently with local fishermen--plus his ability to work with these fishermen. His programs to help advance The Gambia's artisanal fisheries have been successful because they have been based on solid need, on limited scale, and on the manpower needed to see that these projects worked. Taylor-Thomas will be sorely missed.

VII. FOREIGN FISHERIES ASSISTANCE

The Gambia is in the process of obtaining a $3.2 million technical assistance program for fisheries development from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and $1.4 million from the European Economic Community (EEC). The country may obtain some loans from Denmark to help build vessels locally.

A. UNDP

The UNDP project is aimed primarily at developing the "semi-industrial fisheries sector" and includes a total of $1.8 million, of which $1.4 million will be used to cover the costs of fish experts. The UNDP program envisions working closely with the Government of The Gambia in bringing the Fish Marketing Cooperative (FMC) into operation. A project manager has already been selected for this program, but no starting date has yet been fixed. The program will include three years of technical assistance by outside consultants and one year of training for local managers.

B. EEC

The $1.4 million EEC project is aimed at helping to develop The Gambia's artisanal marine fishermen. To accomplish this task, EEC has drawn up a very specific program of work. It plans to build 22 miles of paved roads to link the town of Brikama with the seaside fishing villages of Brufut, Tanji, Batukunku, Gunjur, and Kartung. Next, EEC plans to build an ice plant in Brikama that will produce 10 t of crushed ice per day. This ice will be delivered to each village on a daily basis by two 3-1/2-t trucks which will be bought. The trucks will return to Brikama with freshly caught fish that can be sold in Brikama or carried further inland for sale. EEC then plans to further the work started by O. Taylor-Thomas at Gunjur. EEC proposals envision building 30 more smoking ovens and a new facility to maintain outboard motors. This will compliment their plans to set up a revolving credit fund for the purchase of 30 canoes, 100 outboard motors, and 60 fishing nets.

C. Denmark

The Government of Denmark, through the Danish Aid Agency (DANIDA) is said to be studying the possibility of building 10 fishing canoes in The Gambia. A total figure of $2.5 million has been mentioned; presumably this includes the cost of a complete ship (or canoe) yard.

VIII. FISHERIES TRADE

The Gambia exports more fish than it imports, but because of the differences in value, pays more for its imports than it receives for its fishery exports.

A. Exports

In 1974 and 1975, The Gambia exported 2,103 t of fishery products--mostly dried and/or smoked--worth US$182,521, as shown below:

Table 2.--The Gambia's fishery exports, 1974-75, by country, in metric tons and U.S. dollars

Country	Quantity	Value
Ghana	777	64,104 1/
Guinea	40	41
Hong Kong	3	225
Nigeria	40	4,672
Sierra Leone	1,221	111,411
United Kingdom	22	2,069
Total	2,103	182,522

1/ Based on an exchange rate of 2.00 Dalasis to US$1.00.

Source: Taylor-Thomas, A. Olu. 1976. The interdependence of the Gambia's artisanal and industrial fishing sectors. Fisheries Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Banjul.

B. Imports

In 1974 and 1975, The Gambia's fishery imports were 287 t, worth $199,081, which makes their total fishery imports worth slightly more than their total fishery exports (table 3).

Table 3.--The Gambia's fishery imports, 1974-75, by country, in metric tons and U.S. dollars

Country	Quantity	Value
Sardines, canned:		
Canary Islands	5	1,192
Morocco	5	4,436
Norway	0	941
Portugal	0	102
Spain	143	88,363
United Kingdom	0	839
Total	153	95,873
Fish, other, salted, dried, or smoked:		
West Germany	13	1,019
United Kingdom	0	761
United States	117	97,480
U.S.S.R.	2	264
Total fish, nes	132	99,524
Total fishery imports	285	195,397

Source: Taylor-Thomas, op.cit.

If The Gambia is able to resume exporting shrimp, and when it develops its lobster fishery into an industrial fishery, the value of their exports will increase; in the meantime, most of its exports consist of fairly inexpensive sun dried or smoked fish.

IX. SALES OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. FIRMS

At the present time, there are only two fishery firms in active business and one is the process of being established. These three firms offer U.S. exporters a limited market. These firms could use information of shrimp/lobster vessels and processing equipment for export to foreign markets. They could also use information and prices on small items, such as ice trays, nets, etc.

The three firms may be contacted by giving each name (i.e., Gambia Industrial Company), Banjul, The Gambia, West Africa.

It might be useful for exporters to send a complimentary carbon copy to the U.S. Embassy, 16, Buckle Street, P.O. Box 596, Banjul, The Gambia, West Africa.

X. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Olu Taylor-Thomas and his staff at the Fisheries Division and the United States Charge, Michael G. Wygant, and his staff at the U..S. Embassy for all their support.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the writings of Taylor-Thomas, the Foreign Fisheries Leaflet No. 74-3 (Fisheries of The Gambia, 1973) prepared by Norman L. Pease, and International Fisheries Report, The Gambian lobster fishery, prepared by the Office of International Fisheries. Earlier reports published by FAO provided excellent background information. All the above were used in preparing for the trip to The Gambia.

NOAA--S/T 78-225